

The relationship between the fourth industrial revolution and leadership

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What does this mean for executive leadership capabilities?

One of the most profound challenges facing organisations today is that realities are constantly changing. Having to deal with disruptive challenges and global external pressures are daily realities and would, therefore, imply profound leadership versus being despotic.

The ability to develop new capacity to prosper is an essential leadership capability in today's business world. In former US vice-president Al Gore's book, *The Future*, he states: *"There is no prior period change that remotely resembles what humanity is about to experience, but none as powerful as the one that is beginning to unfold."* What kind of leadership would then be required under these circumstances?

The ability to handle the speed and force of changes, not only by the leader, but also of their staff is of utmost importance. Without emotional courage to face new realities and taking responsibility to create a virtually immediate new future today, executives cannot add value.

The buzzword, currently, is revolution, not evolution, due to the frequency of change. This revolution, however, is enabling leaders to drive efficiency and innovation. The abilities to think on your feet and to learn on the fly have yet again gained momentum and moved up in the ladder of capabilities required. Not only is the ability to see the big picture important, but also to attend to fine detail simultaneously. Almost two opposing capabilities to find in one person.

Currently, leadership realities are unpredictable and volatile. It can only be downhill if change outstrips the leaders' capability to instigate change to mitigate change in itself. Leadership must embrace the fourth industrial revolution as an enabling revolution harnessing converging technologies in order to create human centered opportunities, crossing countries and continental boundaries. This will enable mankind to create and fast track emerging opportunities intercontinentally.

Technology and industrial robot manufacturing companies are integrating. Robots are programmed to operate, what is then more important: the programme or the robot? Do you, therefore, recruit a chief executive officer from the software industry or from a manufacturing company? Smart factories are here to stay to respond to this reality, agility and technical acumen are equally embedded in the 'new' requirements for 2020 leadership. Who would have thought that a taxi company would own no fleet or a currency have no nationality! More than ever leadership must embrace the tools of tomorrow to ensure the viability of their business future.

In the workplace, this could imply moving away from hierarchical organisational structures to flatter structures coupled with delegation of authority, to speed up decision-making. This can only be successfully done if the skills sets are in place to those delegated to and they can be trusted. One of the most important qualities of any workplace today is the integrity of



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the person you employ - from the most senior person to the most junior. The ability to be the custodian of your business's moral vibes is paramount because digitalisation, unfortunately, is also enabling crime to be faster and smarter. Unfortunately, cybercrime is equally enabled in the fourth industrial revolution equation.

Optimal leadership will have to embrace collaboration between next generation industries, government and academia (research) to create a shared vision for the future. The leaders' ability to collaborate with sectors often seen/viewed as unrelated, will become increasingly relevant when ideas from entirely different fields intersect. Technology-driven disruptions need to be embraced to prevent suffocating innovation.

Nothing evolves in isolation, 'it' evolves somewhere in an organisation enabled by someone competent and committed to make it happen.



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